

THIS MONTH

If you're considering buying a new laptop and want an integrated Blu-ray drive, Sony's Vaio VGN-FZ21S (reviewed on page 24) could be the answer. It's not outrageously expensive at £830, and is a great laptop to boot. It's stylish, fast and has a superb screen.

We're fans of Apple's new iPods, but if you want something a little easier on your wallet, you could do a lot worse than Sandisk's new Sansa View (reviewed on page 46). It has 16GB of flash memory (twice that of the biggest-capacity Nano), is expandable via a microSD card slot and can play videos on its 2.4in screen. Best of all, it costs only £130.

Now that almost everyone has a digital camera, hard disks everywhere are stuffed full of photos. Finding the one you want isn't easy, but Photology (page 56) helps you filter through them in seconds. You can search by colours, subject matter or more specialised attributes such as overexposed or blurry, and you'll quickly find what you want.

Jim Martin
Deputy Editor

jim@computershopper.co.uk



DELL XPS M1730

★★★★★

£1,529 inc VAT
From www.dell.co.uk

Subtle and sleek are two adjectives that can't be used to describe Dell's latest gaming laptop. The XPS M1730 is not only a huge beast, but looks like it's had the same treatment that cars get on *Pimp My Ride*. The lid has two huge XPS logos which are brightly lit with white LEDs, while the speaker grills at the front and touch-pad buttons glow red (you can change the colours individually and their brightness in the BIOS). It really is a love or hate affair.

The huge keyboard and number pad are backlit, too, and there's a separate LCD display from Logitech nestling between the keyboard and main screen. This has a number of functions, including a clock, countdown timer, CPU/memory utilisation, frames per second display and more. The 17in widescreen has a high resolution of 1,920x1,200 and above it is a 2-megapixel webcam.

We like the sharpness of the high-resolution screen, but it makes icons very small; lowering the resolution distorts text and makes it look fuzzy, so make sure your eyesight is up to looking at the native resolution. We'd also like the screen to be a touch brighter and, given the resolution, it's a shame that there's no Blu-ray drive installed: it's a £250 option. There's no HDMI output, either, so this isn't the ideal laptop for HD video.

Leaving these minor quibbles aside, there's an awful lot to like about the M1730's specification, especially if you want to use it for gaming. Dell has installed two Nvidia GeForce Go 8700M GT cards in SLI mode, each of which has 256MB of dedicated memory. There's also an Ageia PhysX card built in. This handles complex physics calculations, making games more immersive thanks to greater realism. However, there's barely a handful of games

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Mesh G92 Pulse Pro ★★★★★		Canon PIXMA MP520 ★★★★★		Fujifilm FinePix F20 ★★★★★	
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Nokia E65 ★★★★★		Hazro HZ30WS ★★★★★		D-Link DSM-510 ★★★★★	
Palm Treo 500v ★★★★★		Iiyama ProLite X486S-B1 ★★★★★		Terratec Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity ★★★★★	
TomTom Go 720 ★★★★★		LG 37LC55 ★★★★★		Top Up TV TUTV Anytime DTR ★★★★★	
		LG Flatron L226WTQ ★★★★★			
		Samsung SyncMaster 245B ★★★★★			
		Toshiba Regza 32C3030 ★★★★★			



PC SYSTEMS & LAPTOPS

that use PhysX (including Medal of Honour: Airborne and Unreal Tournament 3), despite the fact that the technology has been around for about 18 months. We hope to see more in the future.

As we expected, the dual cards sped through our Call of Duty 2 test with no problems, but don't expect to be able to play the latest games such as the punishing Crysis at the screen's 1,920x1,200 resolution. We found we had to select Medium quality settings and a resolution of 1,024x768 before frame rates became smooth enough to play. Nevertheless, it's still an impressive showing for a laptop.

For more mundane office tasks, the Core 2 Duo T7500 and 2GB of memory are more than fast enough. There's a 7,200rpm 200GB hard disk for storing all your games and files, and room inside for a second disk.

On the left-hand side of the case is a memory card reader that can handle SD, Memory Stick and xD cards, while the ExpressCard/54 slot on the right can be used to store the bundled mini remote control. This is for use with Dell's MediaDirect – a rebranded version of CyberLink's PowerCinema – but it's odd that there isn't a built-in TV tuner.

At this high price, we're disappointed that the M1730 leaves us wanting more. Gamers might not miss a Blu-ray drive, TV tuner or HDMI output, but it's a shame that Dell doesn't bundle a high-quality gaming mouse – a touch pad simply won't cut it. Finally, the decision to include a PhysX card is a bold move, but without games that support it, we can't wholeheartedly recommend spending this much money on a gaming laptop.

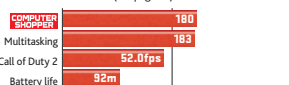
Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent 3D performance
- ✓ Great, high-definition 17in screen
- ✗ No Blu-ray or HDMI

DESKTOP REPLACEMENT LAPTOP
2.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7500, 2GB DDR2 RAM, 200GB disk, 2x Nvidia GeForce Go 8700M GT graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 802.11a/b/g/n, Bluetooth 2, 17in 1,920x1,200 widescreen LCD, 4.8kg
PART CODE NPUK5-NRX7301
DETAILS Dell 0870 152 4699

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



FAQ

Q Is it true I can no longer take spare laptop batteries with me when flying to the USA?

A The US Transportation Security Administration has revised its rules regarding all lithium-based batteries on passenger flights to and from the US. These rules still apply even if you're just catching a connecting flight and the US isn't your final destination.

You can no longer put spare batteries in checked-in luggage. They must now be taken in your hand luggage and individually bagged. The intention is to prevent the metal contacts of the batteries rubbing against each other, short-circuiting and catching fire.

The number of lithium-based batteries you are allowed to carry is also limited, depending on the lithium content of your batteries. There are also rules about the transportation of large batteries used in specialist audiovisual equipment.

For more details, see <http://tinyurl.com/yw6l6bm>.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

alan@computershopper.co.uk



Audio page 46

Apple iPod Nano	★★★★★
iRhythms A-211	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
M-Audio Axiom 25	★★★★
Philips SHE2550 Extra Bass	★★★★★
Sandisk Sansa View	★★★★★
Sandisk Sansa e280	★★★★★
Shure SE210	★★★★★
Sleek Audio SA6	★★★★

Networks page 48

Buffalo Wireless-N Nfiniti Broadband Router	★★★★★
D-Link ANT24-0700	★★★
Domia Bye Bye Standby Online Controller	★★
LevelOne WCS-2060	★★★★
Linksys WAG325	★★★★★

Storage page 50

Asus BC-1205PT	★★★
Cooler Master X Craft 360	★★★★★
Enermax Jazz 2.5 SATA I&II	★★★★★
Hitachi TravelStar 7K200	★★★
Hypertec Primary FireStorm Ultra-Slim 80GB 2.5" SATA	★★
LaCie d2 eSATA II 3GBits Hard Drive 500GB	★★★★★
LG GSA-E50N	★★★★★
LiteOn LH-20A1H	★★★★★
RaidSonic iCyBox IB-3220StU-B	★★
Samsung Super-Writemaster SE-S204	★★★★★
Storage Depot Combo Dual Format DVD RW Drive	★★★★
Western Digital Passport 160GB	★★★★★
Western Digital Scorpio 250GB	★★★★★

Components page 54

Aopen MP965-DR	★★★★
Cooler Master HyperTX 2	★★★★★
Gigabyte GeForce 8800GT	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E6750	★★★★★
Sapphire HD 3850	★★★★★
Sapphire X1950 Pro	★★★★★

Software & Games page 56

Ableton Live 7	★★★★★
Acronis True Image 11	★★★★★
Adobe Creative Suite 3 Design Premium	★★★★★
Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 1.0	★★★★★
Aquaria	★★★
BlackSite	★★
Corel Paint Shop Pro X2	★★★★★
Enoetic Photography	★★★★
Kaspersky Internet Security 7.0	★★★★★
Linguatec Personal Translator 2008 Professional World Edition	★★
OpenOffice.org 2.1	★★★★★
Roxio Easy Media Creator Suite 10	★★★★★
RS Audials RadioTracker 4.0 Platinum	★★★★★
Speedball 2: Tournament	★★
Steganos Privacy Suite 2008	★★★★
Unreal Tournament III	★★★★★

BYTE SIZE

PHILIPS SPC1300NC

★★★★★

£50 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk

The SPC1300NC has a 1.3-megapixel sensor and claims to be able to record at 90 frames per second. It also has a stereo microphone, which eliminates echo and picks up your voice even if you move around. This is paired with face tracking, which follows your movements.



Video quality is good, but you can't use the high resolutions (or high frame rates) in video chat programs. The wide angle lens is handy, though, as it allows more than one person to be in the frame.

Philips' bundled Vloung software has tools for motion detection, video and still image capture and using live broadcasting services. If you want a high-quality webcam, this won't disappoint.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.philips.com

NEWTON PERIPHERALS MoGo Mouse X54 Pro

★★★★★

£50 inc VAT

From www.amazon.co.uk

Hate your laptop's touchpad? Try the MoGo Mouse.



It's a slim Bluetooth mouse that slots into your laptop's ExpressCard/54 slot. When you pop it out, you simply flick down the rear foot and it becomes surprisingly comfortable to use.

You can also use the X54 Pro as a presentation tool. The buttons allow you to move backwards and forwards between slides, while the scroll strip in the centre can begin or end the presentation. There's even a laser pointer built in, which works up to 30 feet.

If your laptop has Bluetooth and an ExpressCard/54 slot, the MoGo Mouse is a nifty device, but it's very expensive.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.mogomouse.com

SONY Vaio VGN-FZ21S

★★★★★

£830 inc VAT

From www.laptopsdirect.co.uk


Now that major studios such as Warner have deserted the HD DVD camp for Blu-ray, it's a safer bet to invest in a laptop such as Sony's new FZ21S. It's one of the cheapest laptops we've seen to include a BD-ROM, allowing you to watch Blu-ray movies on the move.

Despite the Full HD 1080 sticker, the 15.4in widescreen LCD doesn't have a native 1080p resolution. This is a good thing, though, as the 1,280x800 resolution is much more sensible, and doesn't result in eyestrain from tiny text. Plus, because of the dual lamps, this is one of the brightest screens we've seen: we had to dim it because it was so dazzling. Blu-ray movies still look great at this resolution, and motion is absolutely fluid. If you want to connect an external display, there's an HDMI port as well as VGA and S-Video.

Despite costing £700 less than Dell's XPS M1730 (see page 22), the FZ21S still packs a punch in the 3D department thanks to its Nvidia GeForce 8600M GS. It managed a perfectly playable 35fps in our Call of Duty 2 test at the display's 1,280x800 resolution.

The FZ21S matches the Dell's processor and memory, making it able to handle any tasks you care to throw at it, including video- or photo-editing using the pre-installed Adobe Premiere Elements and Photoshop Elements; two excellent applications. The 200GB hard disk is the same size as the Dell's, too.

Elsewhere, there are no obvious corners cut. Build quality is excellent and, like most Vaios we've seen



recently, the FZ21S has a superb keyboard. The large keys make it very comfortable to use. Above the keyboard is a handy selection of controls, which can be used for controlling playback of video or music in Windows Media Center.

Bluetooth, 802.11 Draft-N wireless networking and a 1.3-megapixel webcam are all built-in, and there are two separate memory card readers at the front for SD cards and Memory Sticks. The only small criticisms we can level at the FZ21S are the rather measly helping of three USB2 ports, the inability to write to Blu-ray discs, and the fact that the battery won't last long enough to watch a two-hour Blu-ray movie – it ran out after 1 hour 59 minutes in our light-use test, which doesn't use the optical drive.

However, the price goes a long way to making up for these issues, and when you consider the excellent screen, build quality and keyboard, the FZ21S is a fantastic laptop and a great choice if Blu-ray playback is one of your priorities.

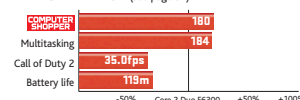
Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Superb screen
- ✓ Decent performance
- ✓ Low price for a Blu-ray drive

GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T7500, 2GB RAM, 200GB hard disk, Nvidia GeForce 8600M GS graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, BD-ROM, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.8kg
PART CODE VGN-FZ21S.CEK
DETAILS www.sony.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



Also consider...

SAMSUNG R70

★★★★★

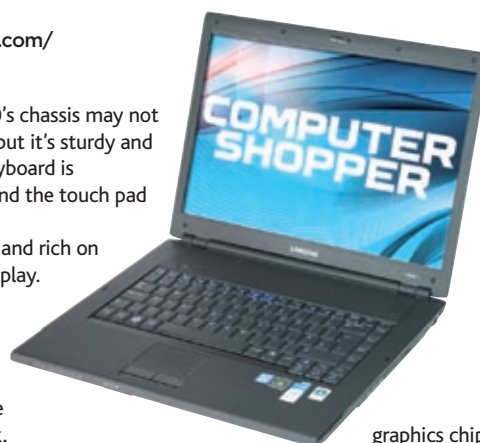
£685 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com/componentshop

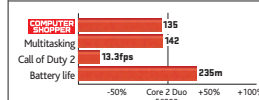

The Samsung R70's chassis may not be a new design, but it's sturdy and attractive. The keyboard is comfortable to type on and the touch pad is small but accurate.

Colours looked bright and rich on the 15.4in widescreen display. You can connect the R70 to a high-definition TV using the HDMI port, and there's plenty of room for your files on the spacious 200GB hard disk.

The R70 isn't the quickest laptop we've seen but it is fast enough for most tasks and it has a generous 2GB of RAM for dealing with memory-intensive tasks such as photo manipulation. The



GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo T5450, 2GB RAM, 200GB disk, Nvidia GeForce 8400M GS graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.6kg
PART CODE NP-R70A007/SUK
DETAILS www.samsung.com/uk
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008



graphics chip isn't powerful enough to play the latest games, but it doesn't share system memory like integrated graphics chips. It lasted nearly four hours in our battery test, and is excellent value at this price.

PACKARD BELL EasyNote XS20

★★★★

£350 inc VAT

From www.pcworld.co.uk

Two months ago, we reviewed Asus' Eee PC 701 (see 'Also consider...', below). Although the Eee doesn't have Windows preinstalled, it is easy to use, hugely portable thanks to its 7in screen and costs just over £200.

Packard Bell's EasyNote XS20 is just as small – it's not much larger than a DVD case – but it comes with Windows XP Home Edition and a 30GB hard disk. At 950g it also weighs exactly the same, so you can carry it anywhere without even noticing it.

The laptop is powered by a 1.2GHz VIA processor and there's 1GB of memory. A webcam is built into the screen surround and you get 802.11g wireless networking, Bluetooth and a DVI output for attaching a large screen.

The built-in screen is identical to the Eee PC's: a 7in 800x480 LCD. It's not particularly bright, but the problem is that Windows XP is unusable at this resolution, as there isn't enough room to display most applications. You could switch to a 800x600 display, but this squashes everything horizontally and makes text hard to read.

Although the EasyNote uses an identical keyboard to the Eee PC, its mouse buttons and touch pad are located at the top corners of the keyboard. At first this feels awkward, but they're ideally placed for your thumbs when holding the XS20. The only problem is the lack of space on the tiny touch pad, which allows the cursor to move only short distances.

The keyboard's tiny keys take a bit of getting used to, but unless you have overly large digits, you'll quickly become accustomed to it.



We'd rather the Enter key wasn't half-height, though, as we kept hitting the # key instead.

We couldn't run our benchmarks on the Eee PC due to a lack of hard disk space, but there was no such problem on the EasyNote. However, we didn't need to wait for the results to know that they were going to be some of the lowest we've ever seen. An overall score of 26 is dismal and, in practice, it means you'll often be waiting 30 seconds or more for applications to load. This is a laptop for light use only.

Even the speakers disappointed with their lack of volume, but at least the battery lasted for three hours and 34 minutes. We're not surprised by the absence of an integrated optical drive, but at this price we'd have liked one to be provided in the box. Instead, you get a basic velour slip case.

Given that Windows XP is unusable at the screen's resolution, and looks so poor at 800x600, there's no reason to spend the extra £150 on the EasyNote; the Eee PC is a much better deal.

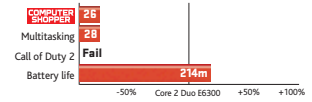
Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very portable
- ✗ Cramped screen for Windows
- ✗ Poor performance

ULTRA-PORTABLE NOTEBOOK 1.2GHz VIA C7-M, 1GB RAM, 30GB hard disk, VIA VX700 graphics, 7in 800x480 widescreen LCD, 950g
PART CODE XS20-006
DETAILS www.packardbell.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



ASUS Eee PC 701

★★★★★

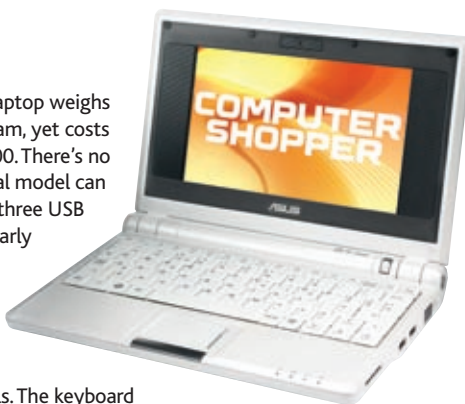
£220 inc VAT

From www.play.com

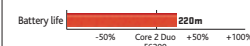
Asus' Eee PC 701 laptop weighs less than one kilogram, yet costs little more than £200. There's no optical drive, but an external model can be plugged into one of the three USB ports. The battery lasted nearly three and a half hours in our tests, which is long enough for most short-haul flights.

The 7in display has a resolution of 800x480 pixels. The keyboard is very small for those with large fingers. The touch pad is accurate, but the buttons lack feedback.

The Eee PC is quite tough and has a solid-state 4GB disk, which won't be damaged by being knocked. However, 2.3GB is occupied by the operating system, so you may want to add SD memory cards for extra



ULTRA-PORTABLE LAPTOP PC
900MHz Intel Celeron M ULV,
512MB RAM, 4GB solid-state hard
disk, 7in widescreen LCD, 0.92kg
PART CODE Eee PC 4G
DETAILS <http://eeepc.asus.com>
FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



storage. Linux is preinstalled instead of Windows but it isn't difficult to use, and several useful programs such as OpenOffice are installed.

The Eee PC is perfect for anyone who wants a slender laptop while spending as little as possible.

BYTE SIZE

PROPORTA Silicone Case for SanDisk View

★★★★★

£10 inc VAT

From www.proporta.com

SanDisk's new Sansa View (see page 46) is a great audio and video player, but it doesn't come with a protective case. This silicone skin from Proporta fits snugly over 8GB and 16GB Views.



There are cutouts for the main dial, power switch, interface and microSD card slot. The Home button is covered up, but a circle on the case lets you know where to push. The rubbery finish means there's less chance of dropping the player, too.

As there's no protection for the 2.4in screen, you might want to buy a stick-on screen protector to prevent scratches, but this is our only complaint about this fine case.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.proporta.com

EXPECT MiBag

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT

From www.args.co.uk

Expect's MiBag is a bulky messenger-style bag with a removable internal bag for laptops up to 17in in size and an abundance of pockets. There aren't many bags large enough to carry a desktop replacement laptop, but the MiBag is fairly comfortable to carry if you're not walking too far.

The removable laptop case means that you can leave your computer somewhere safe if you want to use the MiBag for other possessions.

Interchangeable zip-on panels are available for around £10.

The MiBag is well made, but the chunky fasteners didn't always zip shut as easily as we'd have liked. If you own a large laptop, though, the MiBag is worth the money, thanks to its storage space and versatility.

Kat Orphanides

DETAILS www.expect.co.uk/mibag

BYTE SIZE

PROPORTA Alu-Crystal Case for iPhone

★★★

£19 inc VAT
From shop.ipodworld.co.uk

Proporta's Alu-Crystal case for Apple's iPhone is made from plastic and aluminium. The aluminium back feels sturdy and looks classy but the clear plastic front and rubber side grips feel flimsy.

A flip-down plastic visor protects the iPhone's touch screen when not in use. This can be folded back and used as a stand but it doesn't keep the iPhone propped up evenly when placed horizontally. It isn't adjustable, either, which can literally be a pain in the neck if you want to use it for watching lengthy videos.

A lanyard and belt clip are included, but the Alu-Crystal isn't well made enough for us to recommend it.

Alan Lu

DETAILS www.proporta.com

AMPS LapGard

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT
From <http://tinyurl.com/yoggoc>

According to the LapGard's rather alarming packaging, using a laptop on your lap can affect male fertility or cause severe burns. The LapGard forms a protective barrier between your hot laptop and your reproductive organs, so you can work on the move and still have children.

The LapGard holds your laptop in place with various straps, and an adjustable bar lets you set the base at the angle you wish. It certainly kept our lap insulated, and the wide base spread the laptop's weight, making working more comfortable. We can't vouch for the fertility claims, but the LapGard makes it more comfortable to work on the move and is fairly good value.

Chris Fynamore

DETAILS www.laptopsafety.co.uk

EVESHAM Solar CR88

★★★★★

£969 inc VAT
From www.evesham.com

PCs equipped with the latest graphics cards and powerful quad-core processors tend to be very expensive, so we were surprised to find that Evesham's Solar CR88 costs less than £1,000.

The CR88 was impressively fast in our Windows benchmarks thanks to its Core 2 Quad Q6600 processor. It excelled in our video-encoding test, with a stunning score of 453. This isn't surprising, since video-encoding software tends to be optimised for multi-core processors. It wasn't quite as fast in our other benchmarks, such as our image-editing test, since many other programs don't yet take advantage of the speed benefit provided by the extra cores.

Gamers will be pleased by the strong performance of the GeForce 8800GT graphics card. It coped easily with our graphically demanding Call of Duty 2 and Prey 3D tests. The CR88's motherboard supports SLI, so you could add a second graphics card for even faster performance in future, but we're not confident the 350W power supply would be able to cope with the extra demand.

The 22in widescreen display has a resolution of 1,680x1,050 pixels, which gives you plenty of room for lots of palettes and windows in applications such as Photoshop. It's very bright, so is ideal for games and movies. It has a matte instead of a glossy finish so it won't reflect light if positioned near a window or under overhead lighting.

We were disappointed by the sound quality of the bundled Creative i-Trigue 3220 speakers. The satellites look sleek but are in constant danger of toppling over.



Music sounded muddy and the bass was vague and distant. We'd advise upgrading to a better-sounding set of speakers such as Logitech's X-540 (Labs, Shopper 232). The PC comes with a wireless Logitech keyboard and mouse. The mouse feels unresponsive, and the keyboard's spongy keys are particularly unpleasant to type upon.

There's space for adding three extra hard disks if the spacious 500GB model isn't large enough for your storage needs. Unfortunately, no memory card reader is included so if you want to fit one internally it will occupy one of the empty hard disk bays. Thankfully, a second optical drive is provided, making it simple to copy discs.

Evesham's Solar CR88 is a good buy if you need

a powerful PC for demanding Windows applications and playing the latest games. But unless you regularly use programs that have been optimised for a quad-core processor, Mesh's G92 Pulse Pro (see 'Also consider...', page 28) is the better buy. Its dual-core processor couldn't match the CR88 in our video-encoding benchmark, but it was faster in our image-editing and multitasking tests and almost matched the CR88's 3D performance. Better still, it costs £130 less.

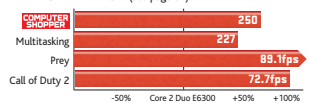
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very fast in Windows and games
- ✓ SLI-capable
- ✗ Quad-core processor is pricy

DESKTOP PC Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600, 2GB RAM, 500GB hard disk, Nvidia GeForce 8800GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, DVD-ROM, 22in widescreen LCD
PART CODE SOLARCR88JAN08
DETAILS www.evesham.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



Also consider...

RL SUPPLIES Modula 4300-OC

★★★★★

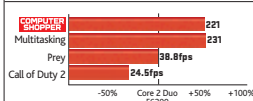
£600 inc VAT
From www.rlsupplies.co.uk

BEST BUY The Modula 4300-OC has a Core 2 Duo E4500 processor that's been overclocked to 3GHz, so it did very well in our benchmarks. It's also capable of playing the latest games, as the results of our demanding 3D tests show, thanks to its 256MB GeForce 8600GTS graphics card. The motherboard is SLI-capable so you can add a second Nvidia card for even better 3D performance in future.

We were pleased with the quality of the Asus VW193S 19in widescreen monitor. It has a resolution of 1,440x900 pixels, which makes working on expansive spreadsheets and panoramic photos easier. It reproduced our greyscale gradient test smoothly



DESKTOP PC Intel Core 2 Duo E4500, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB Nvidia GeForce 8600GTS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 19in widescreen LCD
PART CODE SYSMOD4300-OC
DETAILS www.rlsupplies.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



too. Its backlight was even and colours looked accurate and vibrant.

Windows Vista Home Premium is included as standard, but you can opt for Windows XP Home Edition instead if you have older programs and peripherals that aren't Vista-compatible. The Modula 4300-OC is a well-rounded, good-value PC.

BYTE SIZE

SAITEK Photo Mouse

★★★★★

£13 inc VAT
From www.play.com

Saitek's Photo Mouse is a basic two-button optical mouse with a scroll wheel. It can be customised by removing the transparent shell and inserting a photo. You'll need to cut your photo to the right shape and size using the template provided. Once fitted, your photo is backlit.

The Photo Mouse has smooth tracking and the buttons are responsive. It doesn't feel as comfortable to hold as mice that have a more pronounced arch. Nevertheless, the Photo Mouse is a good way to liven up your desk and it costs no more than Microsoft's popular Basic Optical Mouse.

Alan Lu

DETAILS www.saitek.com/uk

ONECLICK Intellipanel

★★★★★

£25 inc VAT
www.mediaatlantic.com

BEST BUY If your PC and its peripherals require an eight-way plug adaptor you should be concerned about global warming and your electricity bill. Many people turn off their PCs when not in use, but monitors, printers, speakers and modems tend to be left on standby.

The Intellipanel switches off its seven peripheral sockets when the master socket isn't drawing any power. Five seconds after you shut down your PC it cuts the power to peripherals. You could switch off the power at the wall, but this is far more convenient.

It also provides surge protection, and has protected sockets for phone, broadband and modem connections. If you need to buy a new eight-way adaptor, the IntelliPanel is the only one that will pay for itself in the long term.

Seth Barton

DETAILS www.oneclickpower.co.uk



SHUTTLE LinuXPC SD3002W

★★★★★

£517 inc VAT
From www.shoebboxcomputers.com

Linux is a popular free alternative operating system to Windows, but many potential Linux users are put off by the process of installing an alien operating system and worrying about who to call when something goes wrong. Shuttle's compact LinuXPC SD3002W addresses both of these problems, as it comes with Linux pre-installed and Shuttle provides phone support for the duration of the two-year warranty.

Version 10 of Novell's SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop is pre-installed along with the KDE interface. Anyone used to Windows will find it familiar and easy to grasp. It even has features not currently available in Windows, such as virtual desktops. This allows you to reduce onscreen clutter by grouping windows from different programs together. These can then be hidden and switched between at the click of a button.

Plenty of useful programs, such as Firefox, OpenOffice and GIMP, are also pre-installed. Unfortunately, installing Windows alongside Linux is tricky so this isn't the best choice if you need to run Windows programs that aren't available for Linux.

We installed Windows Vista on a separate hard disk and ran our usual benchmarks. As expected, the Core 2 Duo processor did well in our video-encoding test, with a score of 208. Memory-intensive tasks, such as using multiple programs simultaneously, would benefit from more memory than the included 1GB of RAM.

As expected, the integrated Intel graphics chip wasn't capable of running our demanding 3D graphics tests. You can add a PCI Express x16 graphics card to boost performance, but there's no room inside the case for a double-slot card or one with a



large fan. This won't matter if you don't want to play games on the SD3002W, especially since there are far fewer games available for Linux than Windows.

There's an empty PCI slot for adding peripherals such as a TV tuner or wireless network adaptor, but you'll have to ensure Linux drivers are available. There's no room for adding another internal hard disk unless you remove the memory card reader; replacing the existing 250GB disk is easy enough, though.

If you don't already have a keyboard, mouse and monitor then you'll need to buy them, as none is included with the SD3002W. You can use either PS/2 or USB input devices and either a DVI or VGA monitor.

If you want a compact PC with Linux pre-installed,

then the SD3002W is an expensive option. A good alternative is Dell's Inspiron 530n. Its midi-tower case isn't as small as the SD3002W and it comes with Ubuntu Linux instead of SUSE, but its specification is otherwise very similar. Neither Dell nor Ubuntu provide any phone support for Ubuntu, though, but the Inspiron comes with a monitor, keyboard and mouse (plus a GeForce 8300GS graphics card), so if you can live without the technical support, it's the better deal.

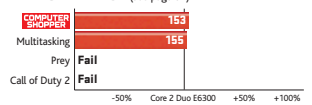
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Compact and attractive
- ✓ Linux pre-installed
- ✗ No monitor, keyboard or mouse

DESKTOP PC Intel Core 2 Duo E4400, 1GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950, DVD+/-RW +/-DL
PART CODE CS-SD3002W
DETAILS www.shuttle.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



Also consider...

MESH G92 Pulse Pro

★★★★★

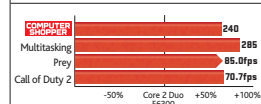
£840 inc VAT
From www.meshcomputers.com

BEST BUY The G92 Pulse Pro is a well-specified PC at a great price. Its 512MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GT graphics card performed very well in our demanding 3D tests. The G92 should be able to play the latest games at high detail settings, including upcoming DirectX 10 titles, for some time to come. The G92 can also be used for more serious work thanks to its fast Core 2 Duo processor and 2GB of RAM. Despite its power, it's a surprisingly quiet computer.

Everyone will appreciate the bright 22in widescreen display. It doesn't have a glossy finish so



DESKTOP PC 3GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6850, 2GB RAM, 500GB hard disk, 512MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 22in widescreen LCD
DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008



doesn't cause distracting reflections and glare. A second Nvidia graphics card can be added in SLI mode to boost 3D performance even further. Usefully, the 8800GT graphics card is a single slot rather than a double slot card, so it doesn't block off any adjacent PCI slots.

BYTE SIZE

MIGLIA Diva 2.1

★★★

£49 inc VAT
From www.cancomuk.com



Miglia's Diva 2.1 is a set of portable speakers designed with laptops in mind. They're capable of more volume than many similar speakers, but they can't be powered by a battery, which means that you're tied to the mains.

The speakers are stylish, with a polished aluminium finish, but the design is less than practical, with the stereo satellites attached to such a short cable that you have few options where to position them. The speakers have a fair amount of volume, but sound quality was generally unimpressive and muddy, and we were unable to move the satellites far enough from the subwoofer to get any kind of stereo separation effect.

Kat Orphanides

DETAILS www.miglia.com

PAKUMA Choroka K3s

★★★★★

£43 inc VAT
From www.ebags.co.uk



BEST BUY We're big fans of Pakuma's new range of bags, with the K3LT receiving a Best Buy award in *Shopper* 242. The slightly smaller K3s is designed for laptops with 13.3in or 14.1in displays.

The laptop sleeve uses sturdy foam ribs to protect your laptop without weighing you down. There are plenty of places for keeping other bits and pieces, including two big zip-up mesh pockets. There's also a padded MP3 pouch with a covered hole for your headphones to emerge from, plus a small zip-up external pocket for easy access.

The easily adjustable strap has a shoulder pad, and there's a secondary strap to keep the bag in place when you're cycling or running for a train. If you're looking for a small and stylish notebook bag, this is both thoughtfully designed and reasonably priced.

Seth Barton

DETAILS www.pakuma.co.uk

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium Dual Core E2140

MEMORY 1GB

HARD DISK 250GB

STORAGE 18X DVD writer

SOUND Integrated

SPEAKERS Stereo

GRAPHICS Integrated

MONITOR 19in widescreen LCD

EXTRAS memory card reader

CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network

SOFTWARE Windows Vista Home Premium

BASICS Keyboard, mouse

Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £400 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 If you are interested in games, upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the Radeon HD 3850 graphics processor will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today) it's worth upgrading to a more powerful card such as an Nvidia GeForce 8800GT.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of

PC activities. To hear the surround soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you.

If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you want to listen to music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 All but the cheapest PCs now come with widescreen monitors. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they feel more natural for working on panoramic photos or expansive spreadsheets.

Non-widescreen 17in LCDs are inexpensive, but not very exciting and quite small. A 19in widescreen LCD is now standard and has a resolution of 1,440x900 pixels. Larger 20in and 22in LCDs are available from around £170 and have a higher resolution of 1,680x1,050. This makes them better for those who want to work with complex applications.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, which can be annoying.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows Vista Home Premium is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may find a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for, so you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, and some can capture analogue video from a camcorder.

